

HEALTH BEAT

Summer 2016

DOES YOUR WATER CONTAIN LEAD?

If you live in a home that was built before 1960, there is a good chance that your pipes contain lead either in the solder or the pipes themselves. It was common practice to use lead in water pipes, as lead was more durable and easier to work with. The Lead Industry Association (LIA) promoted the use of lead in pipes during the 1930's, 40's and even up to and through the 1960's.

Plumbers, contractors and developers were targeted by the LIA—often times saying that lead was the better choice than wood and concrete, and that are no harmful affects associated with drinking water through lead pipes.

This went against the findings of many doctors, health professionals and public health advocates. As early as 1859, articles were written on the topic of potential toxicity of lead in water passed through lead pipes. There are documented reports of lead poisoning as early as the late 1800's and early 1900's due to drinking water contaminated with lead. So with more and more evidence showing a link between lead poisoning and lead pipes, why didn't anything change?

The cost of replacing plumbing has proven to be very expensive to most homeowners. To replace the pipes in an average 2-bathroom home the cost could be anywhere from \$7,500.00 to \$15,000.00, depending upon the scope of the project. Using PEX (polyethylene) pipes can reduce the cost versus replacing with copper pipes. Homeowners who can't afford this upgrade can do some of the following to reduce their family's exposure to lead.

1. Run your water for 30 to 60 seconds before drinking it or cooking with it. This flushes any accumulated lead out of the pipes.
2. Do not use warm tap water for infant formula. Lead leaches out faster in warm water and the water may contain much higher concentrations of lead.
3. Use filters to reduce or eliminate lead. The following website discusses different filters and their effectiveness against lead.
<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/water-filters/buying-guide.htm>
4. For the sake of your health and that of your family, consider putting some money aside to replace your aging plumbing. The average lifespan of these pipes is generally 80 to 100 years before they start to deteriorate.

More Resources:

East Helena Lead Program:
406-457-8583

Lewis and Clark Public
Health:

406-457-8900

www.lewisandclarkhealth.org

City of East Helena:

406-227-5321

www.easthelenamt.us

EPA: 406-457-5000

www.epa.gov/lead

MT Dept. of Environmen-
tal Quality:

www.deq.mt.gov

Consumer Product Safety
Commission: 800-638-
2772

www.Cpsc.gov

Lead Program
P.O. Box 1231
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Remodeling Projects and Lead -Contaminated Dust

If you live in an older home in the East Helena area, there is a good possibility that there is lead- contaminated dust in the attic and wall spaces. The lead -contaminated dust can get into your living space if you open up your attic to do remodeling or repair projects. If you are planning to do some repair work or remodeling and it involves opening up a wall or attic space, here are some steps you can take to protect you and your loved ones from lead exposure:

1. Keep all non-workers—especially children, pregnant women, and pets away from the work area while doing the remodeling or repair work until cleanup is completed.
2. Put up heavy-duty polyethylene plastic sheeting around project area entrances. Construct an airlock at the entry to the work area using two sheets of plastic. One sheet is completely taped along all four edges. The tape must extend all the way around the top, two sides and floor. This plastic sheet is then cut down the middle. The second sheet is only taped along the top and acts as a flap covering the slit in the first sheet of plastic. Use duct tape to hold plastic in place and to completely seal off the work area.
3. Wear protective clothing such as coveralls, shoe covers, goggles, and gloves to keep dust off your skin. Launder these items separately.
4. Change your clothes and shoes before leaving the work area to avoid carrying lead dust throughout the house.
5. Do not eat, smoke or drink in the work area to avoid accidentally swallowing lead dust. Wash your hands and face before eating, smoking or drinking.
6. Turn off forced-air heating and air conditioning systems during renovation and repair work. Cover vents with plastic sheeting and tape the sheeting, in place with duct tape. Windows should be kept closed unless volatile chemicals are used.

Contact the Lead Education and Assistance Program at **457-8583** if you have any questions concerning remodeling projects.

